

Washington, DC - Congressman Steve King (R-IA) released the following column today discussing the importance of honoring our nation's fallen military heroes on Memorial Day by rededicating ourselves to the cause of liberty for which they fought.

Lincoln's Lesson for Memorial Day

by Congressman Steve King

Memorial Day is America's most solemn national holiday. It is the day Americans pay tribute to the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces who lost their lives in service to the nation. All Americans owe these fallen heroes a debt of gratitude, and Memorial Day provides all of us with an opportunity to honor their lives, reflect on their sacrifices, and express our sincerest thanks.

It is important that we remember those who sacrifice all on our country's behalf not only because it honors the significance of their actions, but also because it serves to encourage those who remain as the living beneficiaries of their gallantry to carry on the nation's mission. In fact, it is this principle that is embedded in one of the most important speeches in American history: President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Many forget the backdrop in which President Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address. President Lincoln had been invited to deliver brief remarks at a dedication ceremony for the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, which had recently been created so that the bodies of those who had perished during the Civil War's Battle of Gettysburg could be properly interred. While the Union Army had recently defeated Southern forces in this battle, the outcome of the war itself was still very much in doubt.

Lincoln understood, however, that the sacrifices made by the Union soldiers would be in vain if the living did not rededicate themselves to the nation's cause of freedom. This is the lesson contained within the Gettysburg Address. Consider the following passage of the speech:

"But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate -- we cannot consecrate-- we cannot hallow-- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

When Lincoln uttered these words, Memorial Day did not exist. And yet, the wisdom contained within these words is directly attributable to our commemoration of Memorial Day today.

As part of America's traditional Memorial Day observances, the President of the United States issues a proclamation calling upon Americans to express unity by taking several specific actions. Americans are asked to unite in prayer at 11:00 AM on that day, to observe the National Moment of Remembrance at 3:00 PM, and to fly their flags at half staff from dawn until noon. These are all respectful acts that dignify our fallen heroes, and that serve to remind Americans of the nature of the sacrifice that has been made on their behalf.

I believe that Americans should also consider taking a moment of time on Memorial Day to reflect upon Abraham Lincoln's words. It is essential to honor our nation's fallen soldiers on Memorial Day by rededicating ourselves to the cause of liberty which has always been represented by the flag under which they proudly served.

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